



**LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON INDIAN  
SERVICES**

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**Land Acknowledgment Guidance Document**

Land acknowledgments have become common practice over the past few years, frequently occurring at the commencement of meetings, conferences, or symposia, as well as preface or post-script to written documents. The reasons for offering a land acknowledgment vary, but one can assume that they are offered with the best of intentions. Well-intentioned or not, it is necessary to recognize that land acknowledgements may not have their desired effect.

The response or reaction to land acknowledgements varies among Tribes and among tribal members. Some view land acknowledgements as an “important first step.” Conversely, some have said that land acknowledgments have become so commonplace that they are merely performative. At their worst, land acknowledgments can be viewed as condescending and, in fact, simply adding to or perpetuating the trauma associated with the doctrine and implementation of Manifest Destiny. (Of course, when meeting on lands that are currently, formally recognized as Tribal lands (e.g. reservation lands), a land acknowledgement may not only be considerate and appropriate, but also necessary). Recognizing that there are many delicate considerations that accompany a land acknowledgment, agencies have sought guidance on proper wording and process.

The relatively recent movement to provide a land acknowledgment may be fueled by an apparent reckoning that history, as taught in the average classroom, is incomplete or one-sided at best. On one hand, a land acknowledgement can serve to advance this reckoning by acting as a reminder to some while also introducing this notion to others. On the other hand, a land acknowledgment can seem incomplete and, consequently, insulting. For example, in offering a land acknowledgment, the proponent recognizes that modern day society exists on lands that previously belonged to the indigenous peoples of the area. The proponent may (or may not) also acknowledge that these lands were taken by force, with brutal consequences to the indigenous peoples. Yet, while these facts are acknowledged, no reparations are offered or suggested. So, what purpose did the acknowledgment serve? At best, it offered an opportunity to educate. At worst, it is nothing more than a salve for the speaker and audience. Although it can serve as a form of apology, an apology can be seen as entirely hollow when it does nothing to make amends for the prior wrong.

Therefore, some see a land acknowledgment, with nothing more, as a meaningless exercise that does more harm than good.

Because there is disagreement over the merit and value of land acknowledgements, **it is critical to consult with the Tribes that you are acknowledging**. Also consider several key points before offering a land acknowledgment, either verbal or written. This is not a step-by-step analysis, as each factor is intertwined with the others.

- Which Tribes are you going to recognize?
  - Will the land acknowledgment be general in nature and simply recognize that there were many indigenous peoples in the region?
  - Or are you going to recognize only those who were in the specific location...and if so, according to whom?
    - Attempts to recognize specific Tribes often leads to miscalculations and errors, occasionally resulting in offense to the very people you are attempting to acknowledge. Often, in attempting to ascertain which specific Tribes should be acknowledged for a given location, event, or circumstance a non-Native proponent inadvertently becomes the arbiter of historical facts - e.g. which Tribe(s) has historical and legal connection to place. This should be avoided at all costs.
    - **DO NOT** attempt to guess at or use traditional/historic names of tribes/bands or places unless you've specifically worked with and have the approval of the appropriate tribes to use those names.
- Will the implicated Tribes be receptive?
  - If a land acknowledgment will not be well-received, of course, refrain.
  - If the answer is unclear, proceed with extreme sensitivity and caution.
- What is your purpose for offering a land acknowledgment?
  - Is it to educate the non-Native audience?
    - If so, will you be doing so at the expense or offense of the implicated tribes?
- If the land acknowledgment will be verbal, who will be offering the land acknowledgment? Most importantly, will the proponent be a representative of one of the implicated tribes or will they be non-Native?

If, after consultation with the affected Tribes and contemplating the points above you determine that it is appropriate and/or desirable to offer some form of land acknowledgment, the following language is suggested as a starting point. Consider your purpose, your location, your audience, and your speaker and amend the following language as necessary. Each time a land acknowledgment is offered, the circumstances differ. Therefore, there can be no one "valid" template provided...only guidance.

### **General Land Acknowledgment:**

Indigenous tribes and bands have been with the lands that we inhabit today throughout Oregon and the Northwest since time immemorial and continue to be a vibrant part of the region today. We would like to express our respect to the First Peoples of this land. It is important that we recognize and honor the ongoing legal and spiritual relationship between the land, plants, animals, and people indigenous to this [place/region] we now call [Oregon/the Pacific Northwest]. The interconnectedness of the people, the land, and the natural environment cannot be overstated; the health of one is necessary for the health of all. We recognize the pre-existing and continued sovereignty of the federally recognized tribes who have ties to this [place/region] and thank them for continuing to share their traditional ecological knowledge and perspective on how we might care for one another and the land, so it can take care of us. [If the proponent of the land acknowledgment is a state entity, it would be appropriate to add a closing sentence stating: “And as we are obliged by state law and policy, we will uphold government-to-government relations to advance strong governance outcomes supportive of tribal self-determination and sovereignty.”]

### **Land Acknowledgment Specific to Oregon:**

Indigenous tribes and bands have been with the lands that we inhabit today throughout Oregon and the Northwest since time immemorial and continue to be a vibrant part of Oregon today. We would like to express our respect to the First Peoples of this land, the nine federally recognized tribes of Oregon: Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Coquille Indian Tribe, Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and The Klamath Tribes. It is important that we recognize and honor the ongoing legal and spiritual relationship between the land, plants, animals, and people indigenous to this place we now call Oregon. The interconnectedness of the people, the land, and the natural environment cannot be overstated; the health of one is necessary for the health of all. We recognize the pre-existing and continued sovereignty of the nine federally recognized tribes who have ties to this place and thank them for continuing to share their traditional ecological knowledge and perspective on how we might care for one another and the land, so it can take care of us. We commit to engaging in a respectful and successful partnership as stewards of these lands. [If the proponent of the land acknowledgment is a state entity, it would be appropriate to add a closing sentence stating: “And as we are obliged by state law and policy, we will uphold government-to-government relations to advance strong governance outcomes supportive of tribal self-determination and sovereignty.”]